

# Don Juan de Oñate Takes Possession of New Mexico

On the Feast of the Ascension, April 30, 1598, Juan de Oñate took possession with the following excerpted words:

In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, and the undivided Eternal Unity, Deity and Majesty, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three persons in one sole essence, and one and only true God that with his eternal will, Almighty Power and Infinite Wisdom, directs, governs and disposes potently and sweetly from sea to sea, from end to end, as beginning and end of all things...I wish that those that are now, or at any time may be, know that I, Don Juan de Oñate, governor and captain general, and Adelantado of New Mexico, and of its kingdoms and provinces, as well as of those in their vicinity and contiguous thereto, as settler, discoverer and pacifier of them and of the said kingdoms... And this said possession I take and apprehend, in voice and name, of the other lands, Pueblos, Cities, and Villas, solid and plane houses that are now founded in the said Kingdoms and Provinces of New Mexico, and those that are neighbors and contiguous to it, and which were founded before in them, with the mountains, rivers, river banks, waters, pastures, meadows, dales, passes and all its native Indians as are included and comprised in them, and the civil and criminal jurisdiction high and low, upper and lower empire from the edge of the mountains to the stone in the river and its sands and from the stone and sands in the river to the leaf of the mountains.

The clerk, Juan Perez de Donis, certified the possession and as a "sign of a true and peaceful possession, and continuing the acts thereof placed and nailed with his own hands on a certian tree, which was prepared for that purpose, the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As they traveled north along the Rio Grande Valley, Oñate paused at each Indian settlement and obtained the inhabitants formal allegiance to their new king and a new God. As a divine claim upon land and people, which had been granted by the Pope himself, dividing the newly discovered lands into two halves by the Treaty of Tordesillas: one half to Portugal, the other to Spain, the claim on New Mexico appeared legitimate. Yet, the northern European Protestant countries would indeed challenge this claim, without success, however. Indigenous rights and claims were patently ignored and epitomized Spain's worldview and medieval concept of man and nature.